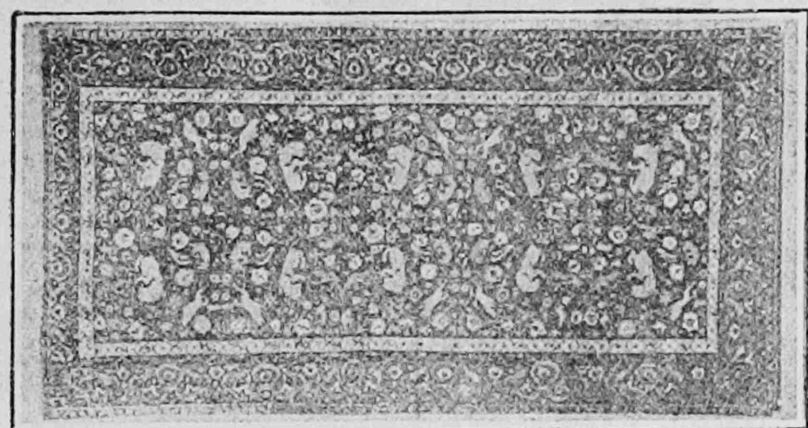
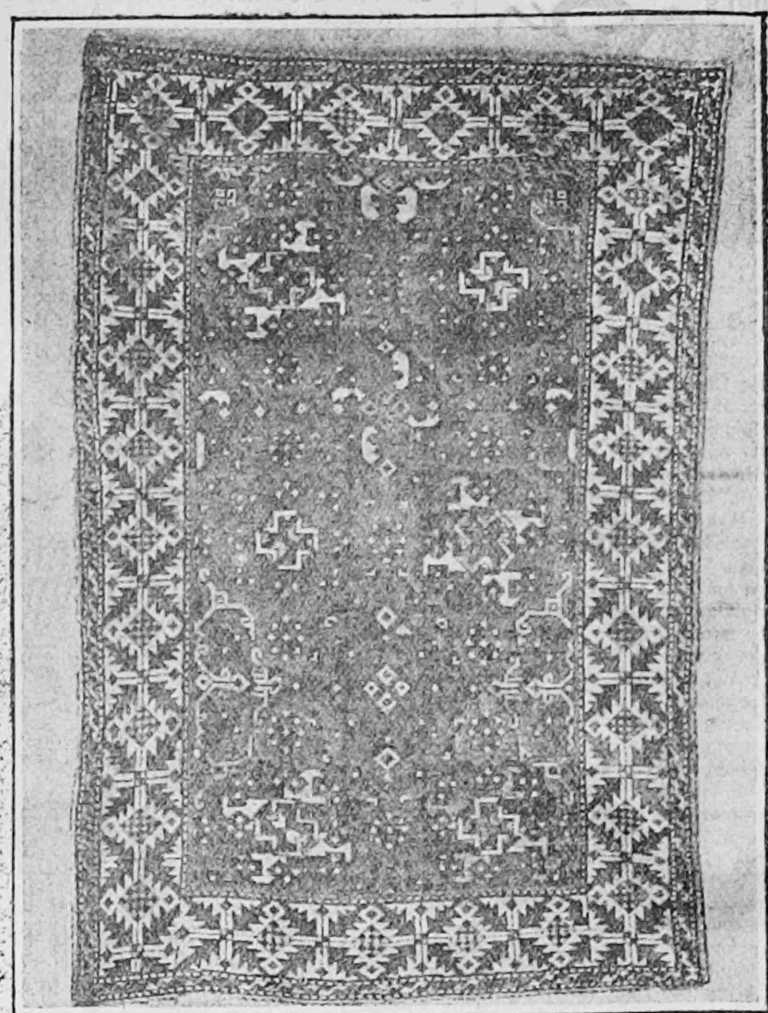


The LURE of the LORE of the MYSTICAL RUG



Animal Rug, from Ardebil Mosque, Once in Yerkes Collection. Owned by Metropolitan Museum of Art



Holborn Rug. Lent by C. F. Williams

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ROMANCE, mystery, intrigue are warp and woof of the Oriental rug. Strange histories are told of the initiated in their very design, and the passing of dynasties and the wreck of kingdoms are included in the chapters that they tell.

Is it then, any wonder that they hold a fascination which causes those of this Western world to spend millions of dollars to acquire them, as witness the remarkable exhibition of these Oriental fabrics in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, composed of products of the ancient looms, which their owners have permitted to be on public view until January? Every precious square there is permeated with half forgotten legends and traditions—every one conveys volumes in its symbolism which translated would reveal many wonders of the mystic East.

The public mind has been directed much recently to the Oriental rugs, for they have figured prominently in the customs prosecutions of the government for alleged undervaluation, and the story of the ruby rug which was said by some experts to be worth many times more than the sum for which it was valued on the consular invoice has been told.

Whether a rug be worth \$1,000, as this one was supposed to be, or \$100,000, which some merchant in enthusiasm of admiration thought it might bring from some interested American of great wealth and artistic leanings, has little to do with the aesthetic and romantic qualities of these magic carpets from the Eastern lands.

So great has become the enthusiasm of Americans for the Eastern rugs, beginning with the Centennial Exposition of 1876, that New York city, which is the clearing house for these fabrics for the entire country, is now declared by Dr. William R. Valentiner, curator of the department of decorative arts in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, to be the greatest mart for them known, even such centres as Constantinople and Paris taking second place.

When prosperity smiles on an American one of his first ideas of household adornment is a rug which is really worth while. Those whose purses are unlimited as far as buying rare textiles are concerned are now paying thousands of dollars for products of the ancient looms.

Some of the stories which are connected with the rugs are more or less fanciful, but there is hardly a really great rug which is not associated with deeds of prowess, with acts of fanatical devotion or with long and dangerous pilgrimages over deserts infested by marauding bands.

Men have been slain for the red ruby which was the idol's eye; tragedy is reflected from the brilliance of the Kohinoor, and paintings of the great masters of the past have been stained by blood. More beautiful than rubies or diamonds and expressing as much the greatest works of the artists of all time, notable Oriental rugs are constantly being brought to these shores to find a place in private gallery or on the floor of parlor or library in some city mansion.

Many a Magic Tale.

If the full history of some of the world famous rugs could be known there would be stories as replete with mystery, intrigue, and strange incident as any of those that centre about the fine gems of royal and imperial collections. Rugs are of themselves human documents, woven from the life of their makers. Customs, language, religion, all the intimate concerns of the people, have a direct influence upon the making of a fine rug. The personal aspirations, hopes and characteristics of an individual or a small group of individuals are expressed in the harmony of color and design. Frequently a great rug has been the work of three consecutive generations that have put their thought into its fabric. In almost all cases an Oriental rug comes from a home, manufactured in the same room where parents and children pass their lives, the product of the family, born of their very flesh and fruit of the best that is in them.

No cold, crystalline substance dug from the earth and capable of being resolved into chemical elements could possess the warm fascination that is part of a fine rug. No treasure of unorganic derivation could be surrounded with the close human interest that is essentially part of a rug's substance.

Perhaps an unraveller of rug histories would find no Oriental fabric that possesses as sinister a past or as repelling an origin as the sacred rug of the Iowa Indian tribe. This curiosity is said to be owned by one of the few survivors of the Iowas in Stroud, Okla. It is one hundred and fifty years old, and cost seventy-seven lives. It is about five feet square and is woven of the hair from seventy-seven scalps in figures of black, white, gray, brown and red. But it is certain that if, by some occult means, one might trace the dramas that have surrounded certain Turkish, Persian and Indian rugs he could throw light upon happenings dark with tragedy.

After being finished in the homes throughout the rural districts, where they are woven on hand looms by methods that have probably changed little since the days of Cyrus, the rugs are carried by their owners to local markets or bazaars, where they are offered to merchants and dealers that swarm through the country. These in turn make up their bundles and travel toward the larger marts, notably Smyrna and Constantinople, where they meet the demand of the outer world. Often their ways are lonely and roundabout, and they must pass with their rug trains through sections where they are exposed to the depredations of outlaws and bandits.

Attacks on rug merchants are of frequent occurrence in distant regions, and the buyer who has a fortune in rugs in his keeping must be prepared to stand over it with ready rifle to defend it from wayside robbers.

They tell a story in Samarkand of a rug merchant who had wandered far into the mountains from Saraz in search of unusual specimens. He had with him a marvellous goat's hair prayer rug of great value. In a narrow valley he and his two bearers were set upon by bandits, and after a severe struggle, were beaten into insensibility and left for dead. The merchant returned to consciousness to find himself sorely wounded and his rugs stolen. His bearers died in the valley, but he managed to drag himself to the heights and a place of concealment.

Makes His Escape.

Living on roots and berries he remained in his fastness until he had somewhat recovered, and then, instead of seeking to escape from the wild region, he took the trail of his precious rug. He dogged the robbers with patience and cunning through weeks of privation and suffering, and came at last to their village. Noting the hut of the leader of the band, he stole in by night, killed the bandit as he slept and recovered the rug. Once more he took to the mountains, and after another month of wandering he won out of the wilderness into a city. His prize, which he took at length to one of the world markets he sold for enough to make him wealthy. The rug is said to be in an Austrian collection at present.

One of the most famous of antique Persian rugs is that known as the Ardebil carpet, now in the South Kensington Museum, in London. Into the design is woven the name of the maker, "Maksoud, of Kashan, the Slave of the Holy Place," and the date of its manufacture is set as 1535. It is believed to contain 32,500,000 separate knots, each tied by hand, and must necessarily have consumed many years in the making. It was purchased for \$12,500, but undoubtedly would bring many times that sum if it were placed on the market again.

What is called the companion piece to this rug, which was, however, repaired by the addition of a border from another source, was sold at the auction of the Charles T. Yerkes collection for \$27,000 to Captain Joseph R. De La Mar and now adorns his Madison avenue home. It also bore the same inscription as appears upon the South Kensington Museum example, which is as follows:—

"I have no refuge in the world other than thy threshold; My head has no protection other than this porchway."

"The work of the Slave of the Holy Place, Maksoud of Kashan."

What a life of devotion, of toil, is implied in these lines in scrawling characters, placed in a medallion near the border of this noble rug! There is something which transcends the material in it, for there is enmeshed in its strands and knots the heart and soul of one who spent his days in this labor of love in the porch of the Great Mosque of Ardebil, according to the tradition conveyed by the woven words.

Perhaps the best known rug in existence is the Royal



Hunting Rug, with Inscriptions from the Koran. Lent by George F. Baker

Hunting Carpet of the Austrian Imperial and Royal Court. According to legend it was presented by Peter the Great. It is of great antiquity, of Persian origin and shows Chinese influence in the design, which includes elaborately woven horsemen in pursuit of deer and other animals and winged gods in contest with lions and buffaloes. No dealer would be ready to say what this rug would bring if offered for sale. Possibly no sum could adequately express its value.

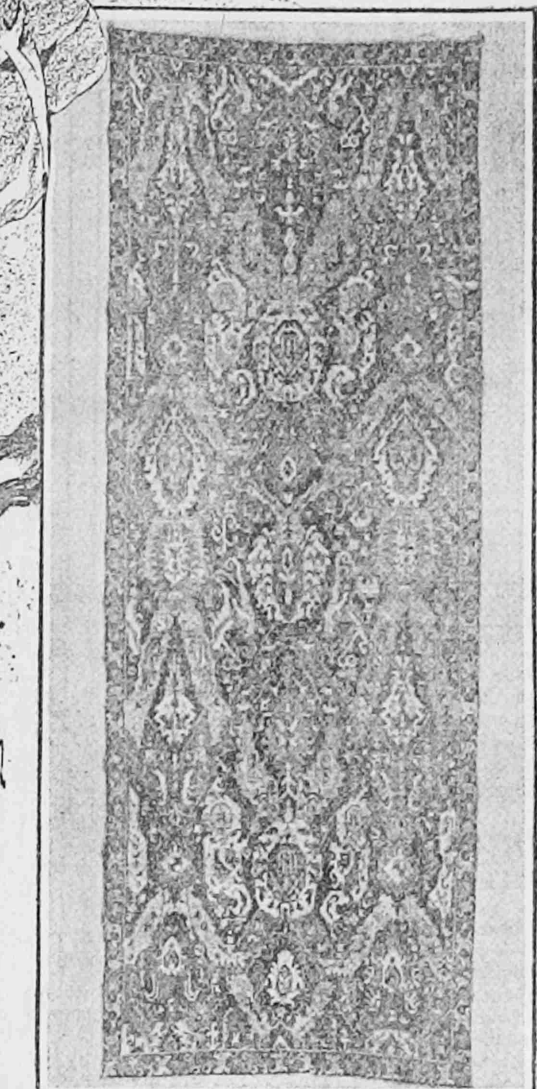
Senator W. A. Clark, of Montana, was said to have purchased thirty magnificent specimens of antique Persian rugs some few years ago for \$250,000. He was also credited with owning the largest collection of Isfahan rugs of the sixteenth century in existence.

Of the highly distinctive rugs known to collectors perhaps none is so greatly coveted as one which is now in the Commercial Museum of Vienna. Its design is made up of the ninety-nine names of Allah and inscriptions taken from the Koran. It was found in a mosque at Aleppo and is undoubtedly very old. The rug seized recently here is believed by experts to be the famous ruby rug of the Duke of Rutland group. It has been sought many times by dealers, and rumors to the effect that it had been disposed of have recently reached New York.

Learning Rug Lore.

Study and knowledge of rugs are comparatively modern—a fact which accounts for the shadowy past

WONDER Tales of Love, Life and Death Interwoven with the Marvellous Fabrics That Make the Carpet of the Orient Priceless, Magical, Mysterious and Beautiful Beyond Compare



Dragon Rug XV. Century. Owned by C. F. Williams

of many pieces that a familiar to present day experts throughout the world. At all times since civilization began the diamond and the ruby have been recognized and fought over, but it is only within the last century or so that rugs have come into their proper place as objects to be sought and differentiated. Only within the last thirty years has there been anything like full and exact information concerning rug masterpieces.

So rapidly has the Oriental rug mounted into favor that dealers have been hard put to it to find the necessary supply. The conditions have called forth the skilful imitator, who has given quite as much attention of late to the manufacture of "antiques" in rugs as he has to the production of spurious paintings attributed to old masters and to the designing of heathen idols. The imitator has a very fair chance of making good his deception in the matter of rugs so long as he has to do with the uninitiated.

The dye pots of rug making contain secret compounds that are carefully guarded and concealed. From onions, bees, sheep's blood, indigo, madder and the juice of berries are produced the wonderfully soft colors that form the chief attraction in fine rugs. In age the colors become mellowed and blended, and the difference between a real antique and a new rug fresh from the loom is plain to the least experienced.

But the imitator acts upon the theory that effects due to gradual and natural causes may always be simulated. So he takes new rugs of recent manufacture, crops them close and washes them vigorously in various chemicals that subdue the tones and add a lustre. The result is frequently an "antique" that will pass muster with any one except an expert, and the wily imitator gets \$5,000 for a rug that is worth perhaps \$250.

Knowledge in America.

Smuggling of rugs often has been attempted, and the customs officers are ready to admit that sometimes it has been successful. The rewards are tempting, and examiners are as keenly on the watch for illegal importation of rugs as they are for that of furs, jewels and essences. Bald undervaluation is not by any means the limit of the dishonest rug importer's ingenuity. Not long ago a fine set of upholstered furniture was taken to the stores for appraisal. There was no attempt to shirk the duty on the furniture. On the contrary, the invoice was suspiciously liberal. The upholstery was probed and finally the stuffing of each piece was then found to consist of beautiful, small silk rugs of great value.

There was a time when it was possible to impose upon the American collector of fine rugs, but that has now become difficult with the coming of more knowledge and a wider acquaintance with these wonderful fabrics of the East. The counting of the knots, the study of the dyes, the sharp search for any traces of the detested aniline are constantly used by the amateur to prevent himself from being misled.

Charles T. Yerkes, who gathered one of the greatest collections of these textiles in this country and might have attained the distinction of having the finest assemblage of this kind in the world, spent thousands of dollars in establishing evidences of authenticity. He grew so proficient in his later years in the lore of rugs that he seemed to know instinctively the merits of carpets and rugs, and many an hour did he spend in a gallery devoted especially to those fabrics watching the play of colors upon them as if he were communing with the souls of the past.

Of late years there has been a growing interest in the Chinese rugs of the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, which are especially interesting to the collector on account of the rich and beautiful symbolism they convey. Each figure conveys a thought. The bride received a rug in which were woven the insignia of happiness and peace and prosperity, while great dignitaries obtained fabrics in which by mystic designs were conveyed the wishes for longevity and continued power. These rugs, although not so rich in color in most cases as the Persian, are highly esteemed by collectors.

Remote regions of China are ransacked for rugs, and prices which bring out those which can be obtained are offered which in time overcome the scruples of the owners in parting with them. Many a saddle cloth which for years served its purpose on the plains of Tartary may now be seen on floor or wall of some Fifth avenue residence.

The forty-nine rugs which are now on view in the Metropolitan Museum of Art were nearly all lent by private owners. The compelling charm of the tone and color of the so-called Polonaise rugs will appeal to all observers, no matter whether they have read deeply in the rug manuals or are without any special knowledge of these weavings.

There always has been more or less of a mystery as to the origin of the so-called Polish fabrics. One legend has it that certain Persian weavers driven to the borders of Europe took up their abode near Warsaw and there began the making of the textiles which bear their names.

Dr. Valentiner now comes forward with an explanation which seems to have a far greater weight of authority in its favor. He declares that the name Polonaise dates from the Paris Exposition of 1878, when several rugs of this type were exhibited by Prince Czartorski from Warsaw. Some of these were adorned with the princely coat of arms, which had been embroidered upon them at a later date. The fact that there was nothing European in their design always has made it difficult to accept the story that in some way the making of these rugs was carried on by natives of Poland or descendants of Persians there in exile.

Some Famous Fabrics.

It is now generally believed that the exquisitely delicate fabrics were made in Persia, between the years 1600 and 1650, and were woven by a special corps of weavers attached to the royal household and sent by Shah Abbas, of Persia, to European courts. These rugs are exceedingly rare and on account of their great beauty are in great demand. The few splendid specimens which are now to be seen at the museum are about three hundred years old, and could they tell of their travels many a story might they relate of lives in palaces before they came into the possession of their present owners.

It is stated that there are about three hundred of these Polish rugs in the world. The best examples are preserved in the European courts, such as those of Moscow, Copenhagen, Stockholm and Munich, and other places where they have been carefully guarded since the seventeenth century.

The visitor to the museum has a rare opportunity in observing the wonderful harmony of colors in these specimens. The principal hues, all of which seem to retain their pristine brilliancy, are light blue, green and remarkable shades of orange and brown, which are especially beautiful when the light falls at different angles upon the heavy silken pile of the fabrics.

The museum is indebted for the loan of the so-called Polonaise rugs to Senator William A. Clark, Mrs. B. Altman, General Brayton Ives, Dr. Denman W. Ross and Mr. P. A. B. Widener. There are also to be seen in this loan collection rugs of Isfahan, so called because fabrics of this fine texture and beautiful coloring were carried there to the market, although as a matter of fact no rugs were made there at all in the period to which these fabrics are assigned. The name Herat is now preferably applied to them. They date from the sixteenth century, and are distinguished by beauty of design and mellowness of tone.

The museum is so fortunate as to own one of the animal rugs from the Ardebil Mosque, which it acquired by purchase when the Charles T. Yerkes collection was sold, and also a large Persian hunting rug, so called because it bears figures of the sports of the chase.

There are two rugs lent by Mr. C. F. Williams, which are designated as the Holbein rugs, because of precisely this pattern or very like it appear as table covers in paintings by the great Dutch artist. They are of ancient Oriental origin undoubtedly, but they are going down to history designated by the name of a European painter.

Those who have lent their rugs to the museum for this exhibition are Mr. Benjamin Altman, of New York; Senator W. A. Clark, also of this city and Montana; Mr. Theodore M. Davis, of Newport; General Brayton Ives, of New York; Mr. John D. McIlhenny, of Philadelphia; Mr. P. M. Sharpless, of West Chester, Pa.; Mr. P. A. B. Widener, of Elkins Park, Pa.; Mr. C. F. Williams, of Norristown, Pa., and the Boston Museum of Fine Arts.